

REMARKS

OF

HON. JAMES A. GARFIELD,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

APRIL 14, 1866:

ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SATURDAY, April 14, 1866.

The House met at 12 o'clock m.

Prayer by the Chaplain, Rev. C. B. BOYNTON.

On motion of Mr. GARFIELD, the reading of the Journal of yesterday was dispensed with.

Mr. GARFIELD said:

Mr. SPEAKER, I desire to move that this House do now adjourn. And before the vote upon that motion is taken, I desire to say a few words.

This day, Mr. Speaker, will be sadly memorable so long as this Nation shall endure, which God grant may be "till the last syllable of recorded time," when the volume of human history sealed up and delivered to the omnipotent Judge.

In all future time, on the recurrence of this day, I doubt not that the citizens of this Republic will meet in solemn assembly to reflect on the life and character of Abraham Lincoln, and the awful, tragic event of April 14, 1865—an event unparalleled in the history of nations, certainly unparalleled in our own. It is eminently proper that this House should this day place upon its records a memorial of that event.

The last five years have been marked by wonderful developments of individual character. Thousands of our people, before unknown to fame, have taken their places in history, crowned with immortal honors. In thousands of humble homes are swelling heroes and patriots, whose names shall never die.

But greatest among all these great developments were the character and fame of Abraham Lincoln, whose loss the Nation still deplores. His character is aptly described in the words of England's great Laureate—written thirty years ago—in which he traces the upward steps of some—

"Divinely gifted man,
Whose life in low estate began,
And on a simple village green;

Who breaks his birth's invidious bar,
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star;

Who makes, by force, his merit known,
And lives to clutch the golden keys
To mold a mighty State's decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne;

And moving up, from high to higher,
Becomes, on Fortune's crowning slope,
The pillar of a People's hope,
The center of a World's desire."

Such a life and character will be treasured forever as the sacred possession of the American people and of mankind.

In the great drama of the rebellion there were two acts. The first was the war, with its battles and its sieges, victories and defeats, its sufferings and tears.

That act was closing one year ago to-night, and just as the curtain was lifting on the second scene and final act—the restoration of peace and liberty—just as the curtain was rising on new characters and new events, the evil spirit of the rebellion, in the fury of despair, nerved and directed the hand of an assassin to strike the chief character of both.

It was no one man who killed Abraham Lincoln; it was the embodied spirit of treason and slavery; inspired with fearful and despairing hate, that struck him down in the moment of the Nation's supremest joy.

Sir, there are times in the history of men and nations, when they stand so near the veil that separates mortals from immortals; time from eternity, and men from their God, that they can almost hear the beatings and feel the pulsations of the heart of the Infinite.

Through such a time has this Nation passed. When two hundred and fifty thousand brave spirits passed from the field of honor through that thin veil in the presence of God, and when at last its parting folds admitted the martyr President to the company of these dead heroes of the Republic, the Nation stood so near the veil that the whispers of God were heard by the children of men.

Awe-stricken by His voice, the American people knelt in tearful reverence, and made a solemn covenant with Him and with each other that this Nation should be saved from its enemies; that all its glories should be restored, and on the ruins of slavery and treason the temples of freedom and justice should be built and should survive forever.

It remains for us, consecrated by that great event and under a covenant with God, to keep that faith, to go forward in the great work until it shall be completed.

Following the lead of that great man, and obeying the high behests of God, let us remember that—

“He has sounded forth a trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat;
Be swift, my soul, to answer Him, be jubilant my feet,
For God is marching on!”

I move, Sir, that this House do now adjourn.

The motion was unanimously agreed to; and, thereupon at fifteen minutes after 12 o'clock, the House adjourned.